

# **Mission Action Plan for St Mary's, Walberton 2021-2022**

## **approved by the PCC on 30 November 2021.**

### **Introduction**

Chichester Diocese has encouraged all parishes to draw up a Mission Action Plan; such a Plan should help to review our ministry and mission at this critical time as the country gradually emerges from the Covid 19 pandemic. The PCC welcomes this opportunity to identify areas of weakness and new opportunities as we serve our community.

This document has been produced making use of a template provided by the Diocese; the PCC appointed a subcommittee to examine the main aspects of our role in the parish and, together with comments from members of the congregation, the conclusions were discussed at a special PCC Away Day. The final document is due to be submitted to the Rural Dean no later than 28<sup>th</sup> November. There are many practical issues to address but, essentially, this is a spiritual exercise, which has been subject to much prayer seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is worth emphasising that this document is only the start of this journey. A full church meeting is to be held in the New Year as we further consult our church members on the way ahead.

### **Our Parish Background**

Our incumbent is serving a joint benefice; he is Vicar of Walberton (pop approx. 2,000) and Rector of Binsted (pop approx. 250). Walberton village is at the centre of the ecclesiastical parish; another centre of population within the parish is at Fontwell village. It is relevant to note that over the next 10 years an extra 600 houses are due to be built – 400 at Fontwell where there are few facilities and 175 near the centre of Walberton. While only part of the 400 new houses will be within our current ecclesiastical boundary, it is recognised that the whole will form part of the Fontwell community. Thus, effectively, the parish population will grow by some 50% providing the whole of the Fontwell Meadows brought within our parish which we are in negotiations to achieve.

St Mary's church was founded almost 1,000 years ago; it is an attractive Grade 1 listed building with the tradition features of pews, a pipe organ and, until COVID 19 intervened, a good, robed choir. While the choir vestry can be used for small meetings, there is no church hall. We are able to hire the village hall and pavilion if we plan far enough in advance. There is also a church office in the village which the parish has rented since AD 2000 at a favourable rate.

The vicar is supported by three Readers - one with a licence and two with PTO - who share the role of preaching and some visiting; there are two part time members of staff in the Church Office contracted for a total of 15 hours per week. Music is led by organists, and a small music group who play at the 10.30 service. Church members generally lead intercessions and read the appointed scripture passages.

## **Ministry Audit**

The following paragraphs summarise our discussions and are presented, as requested by the Diocese under these headings:

- More Open
- More Converted
- More Generous
- More Engaged

### **More Open – How will your church provide worship and sustain faith?**

On most Sundays there are three services: a formal fairly traditional service of Holy Communion or Matins at 9.00, a family service at 10.30 and either Evensong or Holy Communion at 6pm. This pattern has been adopted for some 25 years as St Mary's tries to provide a range of services to meet most parishioners' needs or preferences. We have felt strongly that allcomers must feel welcome every Sunday. However, this is quite a large commitment for a village church, and we are in the process of questioning whether this pattern is sustainable.

Attendance at church services has declined in recent years from a peak attendance of 95 adults and 30 children in 2012 to 87 adults and 10 children just before COVID 19 and around 65 adults and 10 children now; for young families, this is thought to be partly to do with there being so many other activities now on Sunday mornings. Families now rarely bring infants for baptism but there is a flow of older primary aged children. Some wonder if we can continue to be all things to all people. We must come to terms with the fact that our country has undergone a significant change of culture in the last few years; looking forward our responsibility is not just to keep our traditional congregation but to seek to attract people with no faith background at all.

Over the last 20 years, the 10.30 Family Service has become our main service with the largest congregations and the only one where children are likely to be present. It is a less formal format but some feel that it is still too structured and less "free" than it could be and the use of the organ and robed clergy can perhaps be off-putting to newcomers. (Clergy always robe for Holy Communion.)

Our Parish Church is a beautiful historic building which is a testament to many centuries of worship and discipleship. However, there is a growing belief that the rigid seating by pews is a barrier to newcomers and their replacement by comfortable chairs and new heating system would enable the space to be used much more flexibly, facilitating the use of drama during informal worship and events.

In addition we may wish to install a projector system and upgrade the sound system. These things would require substantial human, emotional and financial resources. However, we believe that we - as a whole congregation - should focus on growing in our relationship with God and learning to hear and respond to his voice. We trust that, as we do so, we will all receive a clearer vision for these things.

A review of our services will need to look at the timing of services: for example, would a craft-based children's service once or twice a month at 5pm on a Sunday be more accessible for families? On the other hand, many of our number greatly value the wonderful hymns, the dignity and the deeper theology of traditional services.

There is an urgent need to address and resolve these issues in view of the expected large increase in our resident population. New residents must be welcomed to a living, confident and happy church which is accessible and relevant as we move forward. Present residents of Fontwell village do not feel part of the Walberton's community and yet have not developed their own identity. The developers of one of the housing sites will be providing a small community building: that could be a great opportunity for Outreach both to new and current residents from 2023.

### ***More Converted – How will your church nurture and grow the faith of your church community?***

Outside the weekly services in church, our faith is sustained and nurtured by membership of three weekly Home Groups and a Dad's Bible study. There is also a weekly early morning Prayer Meeting on Zoom which is valued and well attended. We are also blessed with a very active Mothers Union who support a range of charitable initiatives. There is also a RAFT group for the younger women and a well-established Prayer Chain can and does react quickly to the need for intercessory prayers. Our Annual Alpha Course is an effective introduction to the Christian faith. As recently as 2019 a group of twenty members attended New Wine

Particularly in the context of the MAP, it is felt that we constantly need to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to us. Suggestions have come forward to form a new Listening Group and also monthly Barnabas Discipleship groups where we would talk about our faith in relation to prayer bible input fellowship and witness. A constant concern is how busy young parents are nowadays and their "time poverty."

For a number of years our mission to tweenage children in Year 6 and above was via a Young People Together in Faith Fun and Friendship, a group run by a trained teacher with the vicar and assistants. Due to a decline of interest and the interruption of the pandemic this has ceased, but the need is still there. A new offer has been made to run a mid-week service for Key Stage 2 children. (Such an initiative might be based at Fontwell where there are likely to be a high percentage of young families when facilities allow in 2023.)

The support and nurture of the whole family is essential for a sustainable community; an important target must be to engage more closely with the dads. This is not easy as church is often seen as mum's domain. Some years ago, regular Men's Breakfasts were quite popular and similar approaches may be worth trying again. Similarly, the organisation of regular social events for church members can build up the fellowship.

***More Generous – How will your church pursue a radical, generous response to the self-giving of Jesus Christ to resource and sustain the church's work?***

St Mary's finances have generally been in a satisfactory state, although naturally there has been a drop in income in the last two years due to COVID 19. Total income was £100,000 in 2020. The policy over a number of years is to encourage generous giving to support the work of the church; each year the PCC aims to tythe 10% to support charitable Christian work around the world – i.e. we have been "giving away" about £8,000 per annum through a mixture of special collections and PCC giving. Every so often, we appeal to the congregation to increase their giving to meet rising costs – and so on 21 November 2021 there was a special *Generous Giving Sunday* when the financial needs will be spelt out and pledges made by 5 December. Experience is that our members will respond.

Accordingly, we have not had to spend our energy and resources on regular appeals or events such as Church Fetes – although they may bring other benefits to the community. However, the whole village community have been invited to support projects such as the recent extension of the churchyard and the

development of our kitchen servery at the back of church both of which were self-funding.

There is, however, a need for members of the church to be more generous with their time. There is a strong feeling that too much of the work is done by too few people thus making tasks a burden rather than a pleasure and privilege. The world has become a very complicated environment with many regulations e.g. Health & Safety , safeguarding, COVID regulations to mention a few. A result has been that the vicar and churchwardens have taken an ever-greater portion of the administrative load. A sharing of our ministry spreads the load and is likely to lead to new imagination and wider contacts.

### **More Engaged – How will you church care for, and impact upon, the wider community?**

The members of the congregation are heavily engaged serving in most of the village organisations such as the village hall, village minibus, village school, community playcentre, Strawberry fair, Walbinfont weekend and the W, B & WB Support Fund.

Some 5 years ago, we went through a similar process to this MAP, when we adopted our Vision Statement and our logo *Loving God – Loving Community*. Another result was a weekly Coffee Stop in the village pavilion on Friday mornings; this has been very successful and for many is an important meeting point. The Church Office is also a useful point of contact.

The vicar and churchwardens are able to respond to issues of sickness and poverty in the parish via our Support Fund which has an income of £8,000 per annum. It is much appreciated by recipients reaching about 20 families per year.

We are also, rightly, proud of The Parish News – a magazine for the whole community published by St Mary's in the Office to a high standard. This is a vital line of communication; we print 350 copies at present but need to increase sales to be fully effective. St Mary's also has a website and a FaceBook page, but they should be much more dynamic to be effective. Through our ChurchSuite we can directly contact all members of the church via email. We feel there is a need now to review our communication strategy to ensure these various streams are working together.

Another vital channel was introduced during the pandemic by recording a YouTube service every week; this was highly valued by many and a tribute to the vicar and the technical team. This made virtual worshippers feel much less isolated and, incidentally raised the profile of the church in the village. This still continues once or twice a month.

Before the pandemic we were about to introduce a Little Lambs group for pre-schoolers and their carers in the church of the “play and pray” type using our new kitchen servery to good effect. The church member heading this expects to be able to start in the spring 2022 if Covid is under control.

This Plan is being prepared at a time when Climate Change and the environment are important issues throughout society. Humanity's responsibility for God's Creation must be a concern for all Christians. Accordingly, the PCC is proposing that St Mary's should join the EcoChurch initiative through the Christian charity A Rocha. This will involve a careful audit of our worship, the care of our buildings and land, our engagement with the community and our lifestyle choices and plans to improve where necessary.

This will be a good thing to do and is likely to be of particular interest to the younger generations and an opportunity to form partnerships with other village organisations such as the school who have an eco-group. As an example, the village primary school can be encouraged to use the churchyard, which is managed for biodiversity, for educational uses.

When undertaking a review such as this, there are so many things we would like to do but it is important not to attempt to do everything; our planned action prioritises the more important ones that we can do well working with God for the effective growth of the Kingdom. Progress on the Action Plan will be reviewed and amended as necessary each year.

### **Proposed Action Priorities**

#### More Open

1. Consult with the congregations as to whether the pattern, the timing and the format of church services need to be adapted to serve our community as we come out of the pandemic. Consequently, look at re- establishing an informal worship preparation group to generate ideas. **(January)**
2. Experiment with new service initiatives at different times and locations such as a 5pm children's service once a month. **(March)**
3. Negotiate with the Parish Council for the use of the proposed new community room at Fontwell to spearhead outreach there from 2023. **(April)**

#### More Converted

4. Develop group(s) to listen to what the Spirit is saying to us and guidance for future growth considering how these will sit alongside existing groups. **(February)**

5. Develop monthly discipleship Barnabas Groups to encourage our personal walk with the Lord considering how these will sit along side existing groups. **(February)**
6. Seek to involve our younger men to become active members of the fellowship using a variety of means.

#### More Generous

7. Follow up the Generously Giving Sunday with more channels for giving. Consider making this an annual event. **(April APCM)**
8. Design the proposed Full Church Day in the New Year to discover and encourage new talents and develop younger leaders. **(January)**

#### More Engaged

9. Enrol St Mary's into the EcoChurch initiative, forming a green group to take this forward. **(January)**
10. Introduce a new midweek Little Lambs for children and carers in the spring if the pandemic allows. **(April)**
11. Review our communications within the church and as part of our outreach to the community, especially with respect to communications with the new housing in Walberton and Fontwell now expected in spring 2022. **(March)**

### **Resources**

These Action Points are aimed to represent a renewal of our commitment to our Vision to serve our community. They are just the initial steps forward and are dependent on members of our church stepping forward in faith and becoming part of our mission.

To pursue these action points, will inevitably require some financial input eventually: for example, a reordering of the church, an improved audio/visual system, etc. However, the key ingredient is joyful members willing to serve. There is no doubt that our church membership contains people of many abilities and experiences and our prayer is that that potential will be released through the work of the Holy Spirit in the coming months.

Church members will be invited to join working groups to address specific issues and progress will be monitored on a regular basis by the PCC.

**Postscript** This plan was approved before the Omicron variant was identified locally.